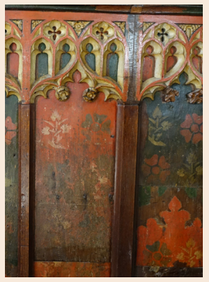
St Peter's Church Little Thurlow

Discover the rich legacy of families down the centuries



History of the church



St Peter's appears in the Domesday Survey of 1086 with the first priest assigned in 1279. The mainly C14th existing church has traces of a Last Judgement wall painting on the chancel arch which would have helped illiterate worshippers to understand biblical themes. High up on the north side of the chancel arch is the remarkably narrow stair to the rood loft where a large crucifix - the rood - would have been. Only the base of the rood screen, the dado, remains but you can see the original colours to imagine how it would have looked in the C15th.

In the middle of the nave floor is a double brass, thought to be an earlier Lord of the Manor William Walpole who died in 1500.

A large family chapel was added to the east end of the north aisle in the C17th to house the magnificent alabaster Soame memorial, one of the finest in Europe. The C17th round clerestory windows on the north side, are a rare feature for East Anglian churches and reflected in three blind circular windows on the Soame chapel along with tracery of a fourth window.

A dove sits atop the brass chandelier hanging above the nave. It was acquired around 1730, the same period as the reading desk candlesticks.



The church was restored in 1843 by William Perry of Clare, including the new chancel roof and benches with elaborately carved 'poppy head' ends. The delightful roof corbels are thought to be part of the same 19th century restoration, a persistence of earlier traditions. The oak pulpit, featuring St Peter's cross, is dated 1876.

1 Early altars



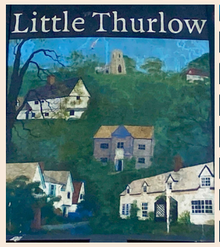
These stone basins, called piscinae, indicate the position of early altars as they were used in pre-Reformation churches for draining the water used in the Mass. The church has three C13th piscinae; a double one in the south wall of the chancel (for cleaning vessels and washing hands) and one in each aisle. A holy water stoup was discovered by the north door.

2 Ascension window



The Victorian west window, depicting the Ascension, remembers Frederick Charles Crick and his sister Isabella. Their father Thomas was Rector 1787-1818 and Frederick's brother Thomas, succeeded him before Frederick himself became Rector.

A great benefactor



The Upper Stour parishes of the Thurlows and Bradleys have been linked for centuries through a succession of wealthy estate owners who have left a rich legacy of splendid buildings and monuments.

Little Thurlow was held by the Abbot of Bury St Edmunds at the Dissolution of the monasteries in 1539 but had passed to Sir Stephen Soame by 1582. The manors of Great and Little Thurlow became one under his lordship and he was a generous benefactor in the area and beyond. He restored the great north window of Old St Paul's Cathedral, the roof of Grocers Hall, and enabled the distribution of food to London's poorest prisoners. At Little Thurlow, he built a free school for children in 1614 and erected almshouses for poor people over 64. The almshouses and the Olde School House with the Soame arms, are still standing in the village.

Sir Stephen was Lord of the manor until his death in 1619 and built the mansion house where Charles II is reported to have played bowls with his courtiers. It burned down in 1809 and was replaced in 1849 but the bowling green remains. The combined manor of Great and Little Thurlow passed to family member Soame Jenyns in 1889. He sold the estate to Charles Ryder in 1896 and it is now part of the Vestey estate.

The C15th tower houses a fine set of five bells, overhauled at Whitechapel in 1999 and re-hung in a new metal frame to enable full circle ringing. In the ringing gallery, high up on the north wall, is a moving inscription to a bellringer John Andrews who drowned, age 72, in the River Stour 1794 and '*Left this World of Woes*'.

St Peter's church is always open for walkers and welcomes all visitors. Today, the building is maintained and cared for entirely by volunteers so we are always grateful for donations. Scan the QR code to find out how to donate.

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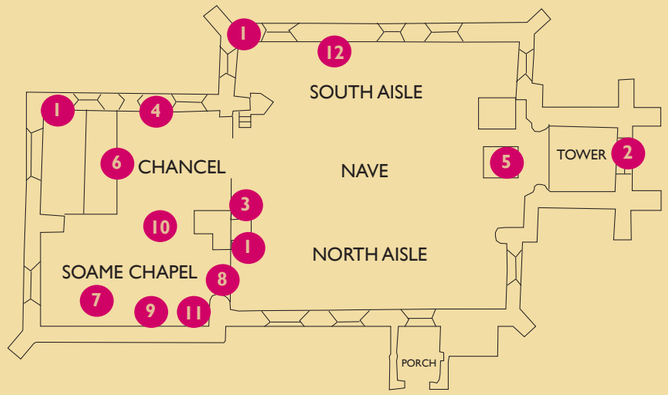


What to discover

3 St Edmund maquette



World-renowned sculptor Dame Elisabeth Frink (1930-1993) grew up in the Thurlows.
A bronze maquette for her figure of St Edmund at St Edmundsbury Cathedral stands by the chancel arch. Dame Elisabeth gave it as a monument to her father Brigadier Ralph Frink, a distinguished soldier.
The east window in the south aisle Lady chapel '*Feed my lambs*', by Geoffrey Webb 1937, is in memory of her grandparents Frederick and Mabel who also lived in Thurlow.



4 A defiant tribute



Among the many incumbents remembered in the church is John Daye, son of John, the great C16th Protestant printer, and of Alice who was from Little Bradley and was related to the Soame family. He died in1627, age 61, and his memorial is in the chancel. The inscription, in Latin, includes 'an apostrophe to death' challenging its power and finality: '*The earth covers his body but his mind has flown above the stars*'.

5 Norman font



The C12th font has a square bowl, with cornershafts. Three faces are carved with stylised foliage motifs, all different. The fourth features a cross patonce, a form of heraldic cross.

6 Altar rails

As you approach the east end of the church, note the closely-spaced altar rails. William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury1633-45, and advisor to Charles I, wanted altar rails to protect the communion table '*so thick with pillars that doggs may not gett in*'. The C17th balusters remain today.



7 Monumental masterpiece



As you step through the chancel arch, you will encounter the full glory of the canopied tomb of Sir Stephen Soame, Lord of the Manor, in the north chapel. Sir Stephen died in 1619, aged 75, and the chapel was built in1621 by his widow Dame Anne and their sons to accommodate this magnificent memorial.
The marble and alabaster tomb features the recumbent figures of Sir Stephen and Dame Anne, surrounded by the kneeling figures of their six sons and five daughters, one holding a skull signifying death in infancy. Above the inscription is an arch with a frieze of cherubs' heads, the dove of the Holy Spirit hovering at the centre. At the top are Father Time with his scythe and Victory with her palm.
Sir Stephen's father was a Norfolk squire while his mother's family came from Little Bradley. Sir Stephen became a wealthy merchant and notable philanthropist. He was Lord Mayor of London in 1598 and Mayor of the Staple, in charge of the all-important wool trade, as well as a founder of the East India Company. He was knighted in 1599 and elected MP for the City of London in 1601.
Soame memorials in the north aisle are for Soame Jenyns, his son Henry, and daughters Catherine and Elizabeth who restored the east window with Soame coats-of-arms in 1876.



Soame Chapel

The Soame chapel of 1621 has richly carved round-headed arches and a fine Jacobean roof with coats of arms on hanging bosses. Five funeral hatchments for family members can be seen as well as a Cromwellian funeral helmet.



8 The earliest glass in the church is the rare 1620s oval window on the west wall of the chapel showing the sun in splendour with the Latin inscription *In Coelo Quies* meaning 'In Heaven peace'. Other glass is later with fine examples of Victorian work.

9 An C18th memorial, to another Stephen Soame, was erected by his grieving widow Frances with two epitaphs - one for her husband, one for her child. Within four months of marriage in 1771, Stephen died, age 34, the same month their daughter Frances was baptised. She died the following year, barely six months old.





10 The Jacobean family pew behind the choir stalls is where the Lords of the Manor would have sat. Note the fret cut upper panels of hearts and flowers.

11 Ryder war memorial



Lt William Ryder of the Yorks Hussars and Royal Flying Corp, was killed tragically at the age of 20 by flying accident on July 6th 1917 while serving in France, just behind the Somme. His memorial, on the west wall of the chapel, is in the form a cross from the propeller of his crashed aircraft.
William was the third son of Charles Ryder who had acquired the Little Thurlow estate in 1896. They had a particularly close relationship and there remain many remarkable and poignant letters between them. Just before William died, his father wrote to him, '*I only wish that, instead of having fine weather suitable for flying, there was an inpenetrable (permanent) fog.*' Sadly his wish was not granted and it had a profound and lasting impact on Charles. Writing to his wife a few months later, he said, '*I believe this war will prove an awful curse in every way.*'
A sentiment echoed by so many, many families.
A memorial to Charles, and his second wife Mabel, can be seen on the north wall of the chapel. One of their children was Sue Ryder, the great charity worker, who later became Lady Ryder of Warsaw.

12 The war memorial, on the wall of the south aisle, reveals that 15 men from the parish were lost in the two wars.
William Ryder is listed on the Great Thurlow war memorial.